



# GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE NEW HOME:

A Democracy Insights Report



**DEMOCRACY**  
PR • SOCIAL • DIGITAL

## Welcome

Where do we go from here?

What does the future look like for homes and interiors brands?

Who will seize the opportunity to thrive, and who will be forgotten in the future?

The past few months have disrupted the life of every one of us and these changes will reshape how we feel about how we live our life, what we value and how we spend going forward.

The country is teetering on the edge of the deepest recession we've ever known, but reality is yet to bite hard. While some are optimistic for a financial bounce-back, hopeful that furlough will have saved the economy, there are worries over a second peak of infections and fears that our bubble is set to burst.

In the world of broad communications it can be hard to find a tone that resonates when every household is facing their unique set of personal challenges.

However, what we can agree on is that our homes have never been so important. In lockdown we've asked more of them than we could have anticipated - and questioned if they were fit for what we need them to be. In the Covid world, the home is the heart of everything - the place to switch on for work, to switch off after work, a place of sanctuary, our outdoor space and the place we socialise.

But with a frenzy of painting, tiling, building and furniture rearranging going on across the country and a shifting eye towards making bigger investments, what does all of this mean for the medium term - and how do more brands grab a slice of the action?

At Democracy, we have spent the period since lockdown advising some of Britain's biggest brands on their strategy and communications approaches. Now like all good strategists, we are looking beyond.

Our insights team has taken an in-depth look at the homes and interiors sector, commissioned exclusive research to take the pulse of the public as to what their homes mean to them now and identified the key themes businesses need to address to get back on the front foot in talking to their customers.

There is plenty to learn from this report - but there is more to gain from allocating some time for us to talk you through it.

If you like what you read or if it strikes a chord, pick up the phone and let's talk.

**JENNIFER O'GRADY** - Agency founder and owner

## The media during covid

Across print, online and broadcast, the media has had to change drastically to remain relevant to their audience's lives.

Media consumption has sky-rocketed as people spend more time at home and seek out news and entertainment. Demand for DIY, gardening and homes and interior magazines has soared as locked-down households spend more time on hobbies, with magazine downloads up two-thirds on the previous year. We've also seen the most trusted sources, particularly broadcast, increase audience share as people seek the most authoritative voices to guide them at this time.



## Homes and interiors magazines

Although the news agenda has been changeable, product and shopping pages remain largely unaffected as they've always been angled towards deals, tutorial content and well-known online retailers and brands.

For print media, the pandemic has accelerated circulation decline and with commuter consumption down, titles such as the Evening Standard refocused efforts in digital content.

In late May, it was announced that newspapers would no longer be obligated to report on circulation figures, a small victory as many faced slashed advertising budgets and plummeting readership.

Despite this decline in print readership, the national media audience has never been bigger - with an increasing appetite for online homes and interiors content focusing on how small DIY activities and a sprinkle of colour can improve mood and wellbeing.

Titles including HomeStyle and Good Homes suspended print production in April, ploughing refocusing efforts into digital content. They're planning a big return for their September issues and brands should be getting relevant content together for print and online.





## Influencers

**During lockdown, many influencers have taken a real hit -but those posting DIY and interior design content are thriving.**

Many have more time on their hands to engage in brand campaigns and are receptive to revisiting past content to keep their audiences engaged.

Established content creators have leveraged this interest by continuing to work on numerous brand campaigns throughout lockdown. For instance, Kerry Lockwood has been one very active influencer in the homes and interiors space - with more than 136,000 followers, she is well respected in the homes and interiors sector and runs a successful YouTube channel and blog.

With content threads focused on 'easy' makeovers, influencers have been posting more stories than before - protecting their built grid aesthetic and still building relationships with lockdown audiences - increasing reach as a result.

**Against the backdrop of Black Lives Matter, there has been an increasing demand for diversity within the creative community. Many BAME interior designers have joined together to create group project opportunities under the hashtags #blackhomesuk. Brands need to urgently review their own mix of influencer relationships and develop a plan to go forward in a way that encourages diversity.**



## Rise of podcasts

Podcasts have been on the PR target list for some time and their popularity has increased during lockdown.

Interestingly, consumption habits have changed as listeners previously used podcasts to 'switch on' during their commute, but now use them to 'wind down' at the end of a busy day working from home.

Listening through **Alexa devices increased +26% in March**, compared to February as more people connect via smart devices in the home showing a further shift from analogue listening.

Though the audiences for podcasts are typically smaller than that of digital media channels, their audiences are highly engaged and adverts are more relevant and likely to resonate with them.

Listening to a podcast is very intentional. Podcast listeners usually select one podcast to listen to and eventually tune in. Audiences listen to a specific podcast because it piques their interest or has an affinity to the topic it presents, thus they are more receptive to your message.

Throughout lockdown, radio and podcast listening offers a form of companionship in a way that music streaming never could and as we ease out of these measures, it's likely that some engaging presenters have found fans for life.

For brands there are opportunities to secure slots on some of the top interiors podcasts throughout the UK, including:

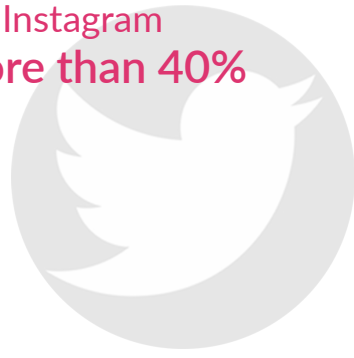
- The Great Indoors
- Modern House
- The House Guest
- Affordable Interior Design
- The Chaise Lounge





As the pandemic raged on, social media use surged. A study from Kantar discovered that during this time, engagement increased **61% over normal usage rates.**

Twitter has seen an **increase of 23%** more daily users compared to the same period in 2019, and usage on messaging platforms Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram **have increased by more than 40%** among 18-34 year olds.



While the appetite for news remained strong, audiences were most certainly using their scrolling time to seek out entertainment, inspiration and advice. Quick to adapt, platforms have rolled out new features to enhance engagement, increase dwell time and encourage purchase.

For example, Pinterest has seen the emergence of search trends heavily influenced by lockdown and a **44% YoY increase in pinners actively engaging with shopping pins.** Fast to capitalise on the opportunity, Pinterest updated its Shopify app, adding a new option that would enable merchants to upload their entire product catalog into shoppable pins.

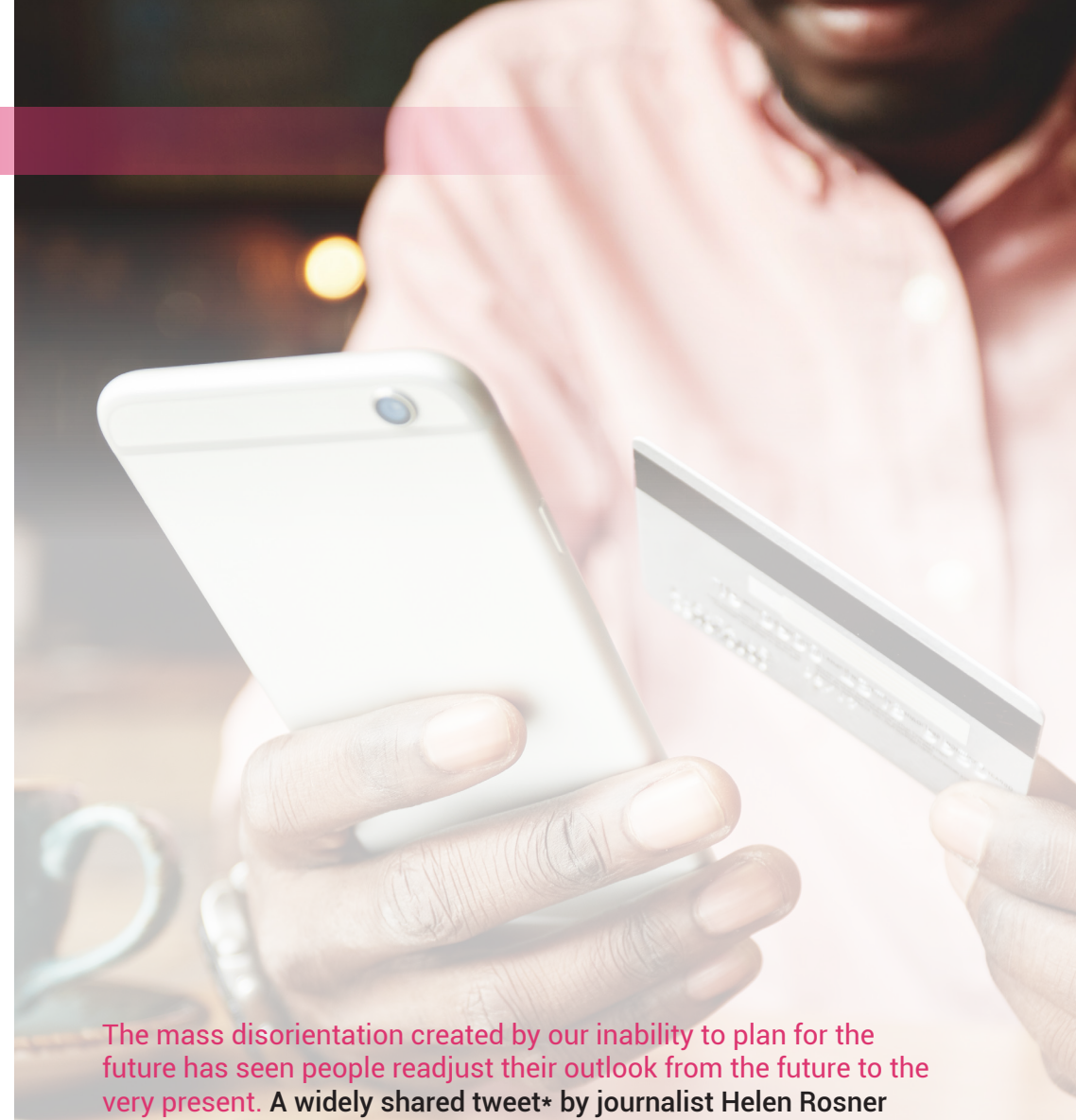
**With 367 million active monthly users, this has been a game changer for merchants of all sizes selling across the platform.**

Media outlets are also switching focus to social platforms to attract new audiences to view content (and as a result bolster ad revenue through video views!) so brands need to have a 'digital first' ready package to drive home key messages and generate leads - and links - from authoritative media platforms.

## Living online

Denied so much normality, people are looking for instant gratification, the thrill that an online purchase brings and the familiarity of a delivery parcel at the door - this is evidenced in the 129 per cent surge in online shopping throughout the UK and Europe during the pandemic.

The increased time spent on our devices has increased the reach and uptake of challenger social platforms - **such as TikTok** - where everyone can be creator, broadcaster, influencer, and more. In the UK alone 24 million users, that's one in three of the population, have TikTok installed on their devices. The week that lockdown was announced, 278k users downloaded the app and in the following weeks, UK installations increased by a further 34 per cent.



The mass disorientation created by our inability to plan for the future has seen people readjust their outlook from the future to the very present. **A widely shared tweet\* by journalist Helen Rosner** described our current situation as 'the infinite present' because we have 'no future plans, no anticipation of travel or shows or events or celebrations. It's an endless today, never tomorrow'.

Pinterest reported that up to May, **searches around 'Information For Now' (e.g. crafts, recipes, DIY) had surged** while 'Information For Future' had dipped considerably, only now starting to get back towards normal levels.

\*the tweet gained 79k likes and 12k comments



## Why stakeholders matter

### As our new reality sank in, consumers began to question the kind of companies they did business with and new voices were heard.

Suddenly, how you treat your employees, keep your customers safe, manage your supply chain, protect delivery drivers and support the national effort became headline making news.

We live in a true media democracy where everyone has the power to broadcast but few have enough influence to affect change. Covid-19 shifted the PR landscape overnight. Brands needed to quickly get to grips with these new stakeholders and what mattered to them to develop a clear and consistent PR comms strategy and remain in control of their own brand narrative. Reaffirming who they are and what they stand more – being true to a brand's self and distinctive amongst all the noise - has never been so important.

Internal and external stakeholders are interested in the same message, want a consistent tone of voice, need examples to back up the words. They look for proof that you can be trusted.

The pandemic brought many examples of companies rushing to lay off workers - think Sports Direct, Virgin Atlantic and Wetherspoons - and others being called out for forcing staff to turn up without proper safety measures being in place. These authentic first hand accounts carry tremendous significance, especially with younger consumers in the purchasing decisions they make.

Winning brands identified early on that they needed to listen and engage this wider group of stakeholders. Using this insight, they ditched advertising spend in favour of donating to food banks, handed over PPE and antibacterial paint to healthcare staff. They found ways to help and were sensitive in the way they communicated the help they were providing.

During the early days of Covid, timeliness was key. Quick to act brands like Tile Giant and Lick made news by giving back to the NHS and the wider care community, offering free meals and vouchers, discounts to the NHS and other key workers. Those who were slower to commit didn't get the same cut through.

Later, after the initial shock and against a turbulent economic agenda, brands began to consider where they could step in to support a core community and win favour. These brands ensured that their good deeds were made public using the authentic power of PR and owned social channels driving consideration and building positive brand association for the future.

Now, as we exit lockdown, customers are looking to brands to have a moral responsibility to help them get back on their feet. In the world of homes and interiors, this includes giving tradespeople the tools they need to help homeowners welcome them back into their homes.

## Winners

### B&Q

B&Q closed its doors to customers to buy time to reflect on how it could reopen safely. Its online shop was reduced and non essentials stripped from the range to allow people to get only what they needed.

When it did reopen the doors it was a gradual reopening and the comms were tightly controlled with a focus on explaining the new safety measures put in place to protect colleagues and customers.

B&Q aligned with the mood of championing all our key workers by using the hashtag #togetherwecandoit to highlight work done in hospitals, care homes, schools, and charities. The brand also communicated how it had made a direct difference by donating plants, flowers and equipment to offer support.

With garden centres closed, B&Q ramped up comms around making the most of outdoor space. Customers were emailed easy to follow guides to simple jobs that anyone could achieve such as planting, mowing and garden decor, providing inspiration and purpose to a growing number of bored homeowners, engaging a new audience of DIY Covid converts.

As a result, the retailer recently reported that second quarter like-for-like sales rose by over 21 per cent.

### DUNELM

In a similar thread to B&Q, Dunelm stayed top of mind for consumers with continuous and clear communication. As well as store comms, Dunelm continued an 'always on' approach to product and style placements in key national trends and homes / interiors features to provide inspiration to those locked down at home.

Reputationally, Dunelm newsletters and full page ads outlined the key areas it was supporting staff, customers, the NHS and other key workers - covering all bases for consumer queries in one fell swoop.

A consistent stream of messaging reached audiences at different stages through the pandemic - keeping customers engaged and on the journey whilst always mirroring the wider mood of the country.

### ZOOPLA

As house viewings ground to a halt and prices plummeted, many in the industry went silent and took stock of the uncertain situation they found themselves in.

Not Zoopla.

While its competitors faded into the background, Zoopla became unavoidable - readily available with experts and data to challenge and guide the changing narrative - especially in the early days of lockdown.

The mechanic for engagement was simple, but consistent, offering a chance to cement the business position as a leader in the property market against online rivals - like Rightmove - who remained quiet until more recently.

Resourcing new and relevant assets by using authoritative site search data, Zoopla were able to secure top spots on BBC Radio 4 talking about the pent up demand they were experiencing, lead national and regional data stories about the areas locked down Brits were dreaming off migrating to and continue to champion confidence in the housing market - for buyers and sellers alike.

As we exit lockdown and the property market picks up as buyers decide their home is no longer fit for purpose, Zoopla is in the strongest position to go forward.



## Case study - Dulux

Dulux has been working with Democracy since 2018. Our brief is to bring stakeholder communications across consumer, decorator and specifier audiences together under a masterbrand positioning.

Dulux, the UK's leading paint brand, completely overhauled its comms to offer appropriate advice and support to its varied stakeholders - all with the aim of bringing colour to people's lives in lockdown.

Across the construction and decorating industry, there were many examples of people going above and beyond during the pandemic. Dulux identified the need to bring partners across the industry together to shine a spotlight on these acts of kindness, however big or small, to spread positivity during such a difficult time.

Working in partnership with comms teams from businesses including Homebase, Travis Perkins and Lucas, Dulux united the industry behind the #TrueColours movement, building a long term platform to celebrate the contribution of individuals across the construction industry.

Decorators were hit hard by the pandemic, with 64% forced to down tools, and as many as 34,000 predicted to leave the industry as a result of COVID-19.

Dulux Trade quickly developed a suite of decorator resources to support the trade, with advice on getting access to Government support, business management resources to help decorators future proof their businesses and opportunities to upskill in lockdown via Dulux Academy Live, a series of virtual training courses from industry experts.

The businesses' retail arm Dulux Decorator Centre was initially closed, but once it reopened, comms focused on supporting their customers to get back to business.

They launched a campaign to back decorators including offering discounts on accounts terms, a Checkatrade partnership to help customers promote their businesses and a Workfinder to unite biggest contractors with jobs available with smaller decorators looking for work.

And for bigger contractors, an industry insights webinar series was launched to bring together industry experts from businesses like Willmott Dixon to give customers firsthand insights into how they could respond and adapt to face the challenges of working in construction during COVID-19. The launch was a huge success with 131 attendees on first Dulux Decorator Centre insights webinar.

For consumers, Dulux maximised its in-house expertise, using creative director Marianne Shillingford to produce 'at home' inspirational content for their owned channels, showing those stuck at home what they could achieve.

A string of at-home produced content to be executed across Dulux social media channels to engage the ever growing lockdown audience with fun, helpful content they could replicate with little equipment or budget. This was then seeded to high authority sites to spread awareness and drive visits to the page.

**With our unrivaled contact list, and a stream of top quality content, we secured coverage across the UK's highest authority media including The Sunday Times and reached over 8million people.**

# Key report findings



## 1 Becoming relevant to a new generation of DIYers



It comes as no surprise that more time indoors, the end of normal routines and the impact of forced loneliness have seen new behaviours develop; **Netflix amassed 16 million new subscribers worldwide**, workouts at home have driven a **500% sales uplift in gym equipment** while at UK supermarkets, full trolley shops have gone up 56%.

Such changes have their foundations in fundamental behaviour change, whether that is because it has been forced upon them or driven by changing value systems related to the crisis.

Within the homes and interiors sector, there have been similar fluctuations. Google searches relating to DIY have doubled, demonstrating that while trades professionals weren't able to take on non-essential jobs, people haven't been deterred from completing certain jobs themselves. In fact, this interest has been spearheaded by those who have traditionally been very hesitant about picking up a hammer or paint brush.

**Our research found that 56% of those who made changes to their interiors were aged 25 to 54 with the second most prominent group being those under 24.**

Much of this new drive to DIY would have had to be self-taught with many turning online and to friends and family for guidance. While three quarters of over-55s haven't required any support over this crisis period, **a third of those aged between 24 and 34 were going straight to online video tutorials to get the knowledge** needed to address their home DIY projects.

**With experience has come confidence. 68% of respondents aged 25-34 have stated that they feel more confident as a result of their lockdown projects, followed closely at 65% by those aged under 24.**

A younger and more confident audience presents a chance for brands to make new connections as they demonstrate their relevance to this audience by focusing on encouragement and recognition, alongside education.



Opportunities



- Listen up - use social media listening and swiftly develop content, or repurpose existing assets, that taps into and supports what target customers are talking about.
- Inspire - invest in online tutorials relevant to the life stages of the under-34s designed to inspire, guide and empower them through video while their appetite is growing.
- After YouTube, Instagram is the most popular source for brand research for this age group and brands need to pay attention to the channel to win increasing exposure of user generated content to allow them the platform to show off their new found skills.
- Relevance can be most effectively demonstrated through partnerships with authentic influencers. Seek long term relationships with influencers who genuinely believe in what you have to offer and are willing to cocreate.
- The BAME community are actively seeking new ways to work with brands - this is an opportunity for all brands to explore in a way most relevant to them.

## Focus on: Outdoor living

With lockdown taking place during the sunniest spring since records began, gardens have been “an absolute sanctuary” for many in the UK.

Now, as the gardens morph into both our socially distant entertaining space and our summer holiday destination, the value of our green space has never been greater.

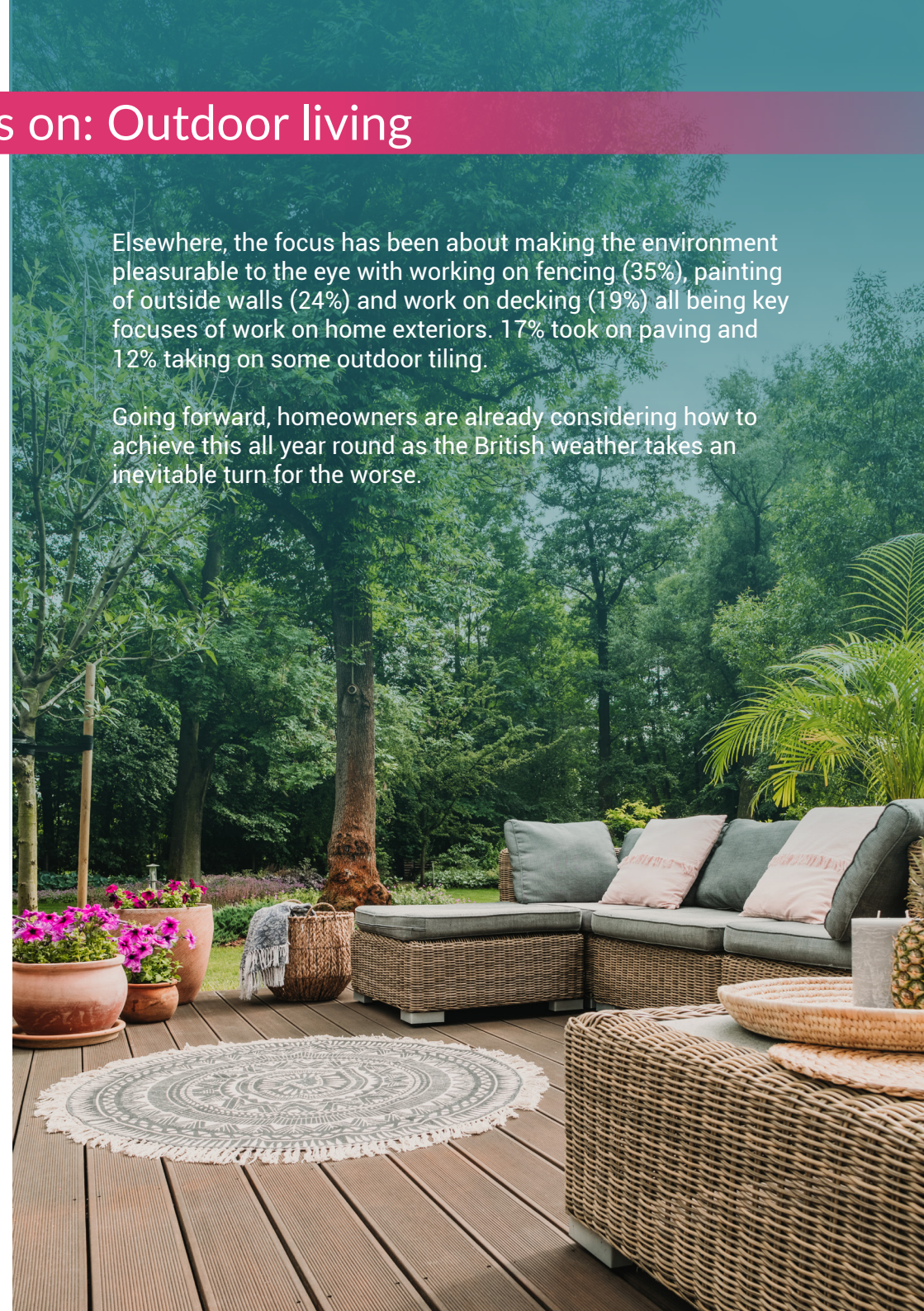
Rightmove has reported **searches for homes with gardens jumped 42% in May** compared to the same time last year, increasing to 84% among renters. As sellers look to put their properties on the market, they'll be encouraged to get their garden looking tiptop to increase their property value.

We found that **8 out of 10 people in the UK have a garden or outside space**. During lockdown 58% of respondents stated that they were spending more time in their outside space than ever before with **40% of all Brits saying that their garden has been the most important attribute to making lockdown bearable**.

A third of our respondents completed work to the exterior of their homes, with gardening the top job. 77% of those over 45 who made changes to their outdoors said they chose to garden for pleasure.

Elsewhere, the focus has been about making the environment pleasurable to the eye with working on fencing (35%), painting of outside walls (24%) and work on decking (19%) all being key focuses of work on home exteriors. 17% took on paving and 12% taking on some outdoor tiling.

Going forward, homeowners are already considering how to achieve this all year round as the British weather takes an inevitable turn for the worse.





## The platform to watch

“

Think TikTok  
is just for kids?

Think again.

”

The short-form video platform has grown in popularity over the last two years and while originally popular with Gen Z, the hunt for entertainment during Covid meant downloads reached two billion in April!

**Let that sink in for a moment... two billion peoples' worth of data.**

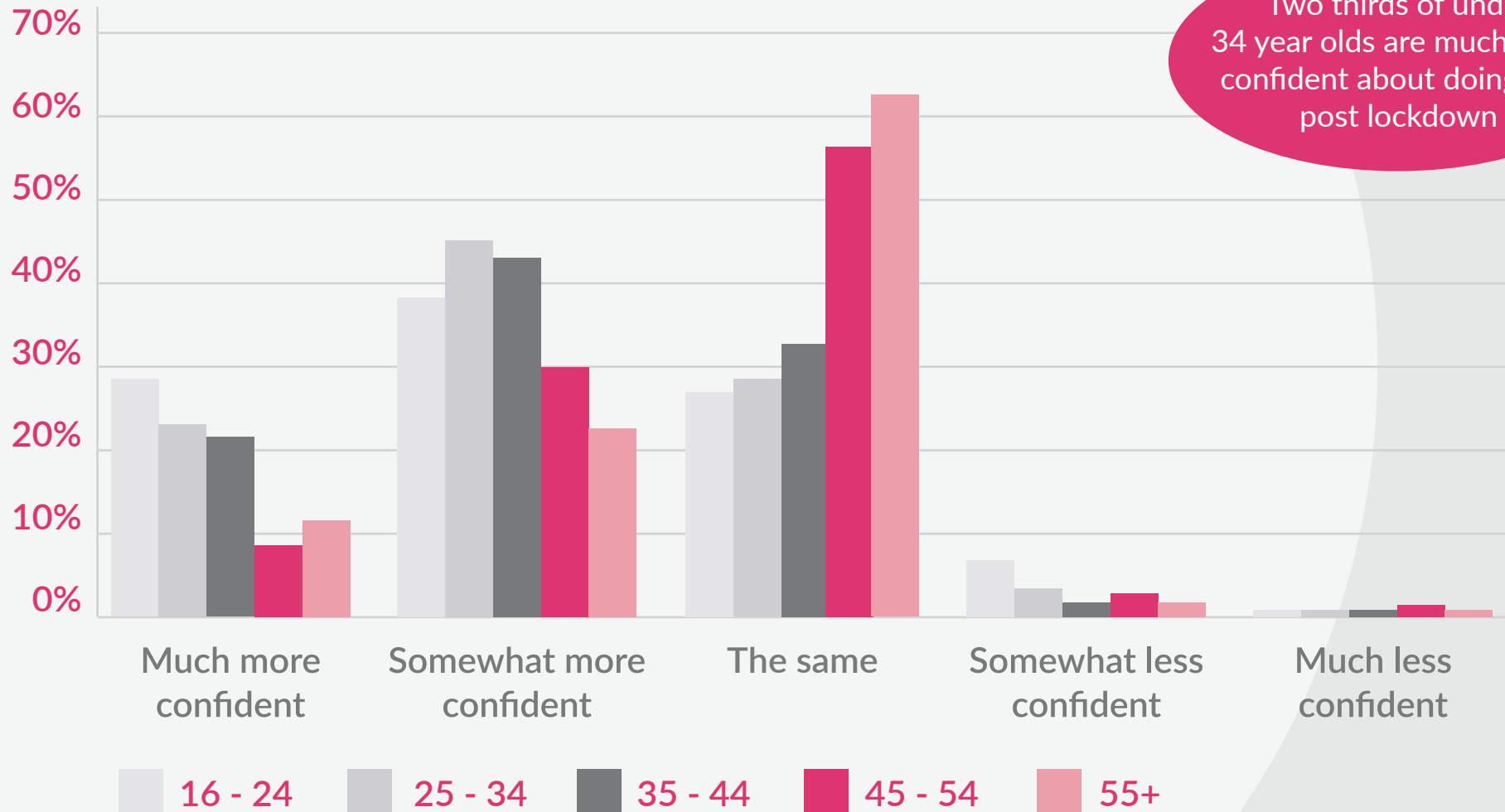
With such vast knowledge about users' interests and online habits, TikTok's algorithm updates are creating a powerful platform that's helping businesses tap into the inner-most desires of their audiences and directing them to a host of topics.

Hashtags are an essential element of TikTok, with popularity for #interiordesign #tutorials and #decorating growing daily. But for brands who want to include the platform in their marketing mix, it's all about the branded hashtag challenge.

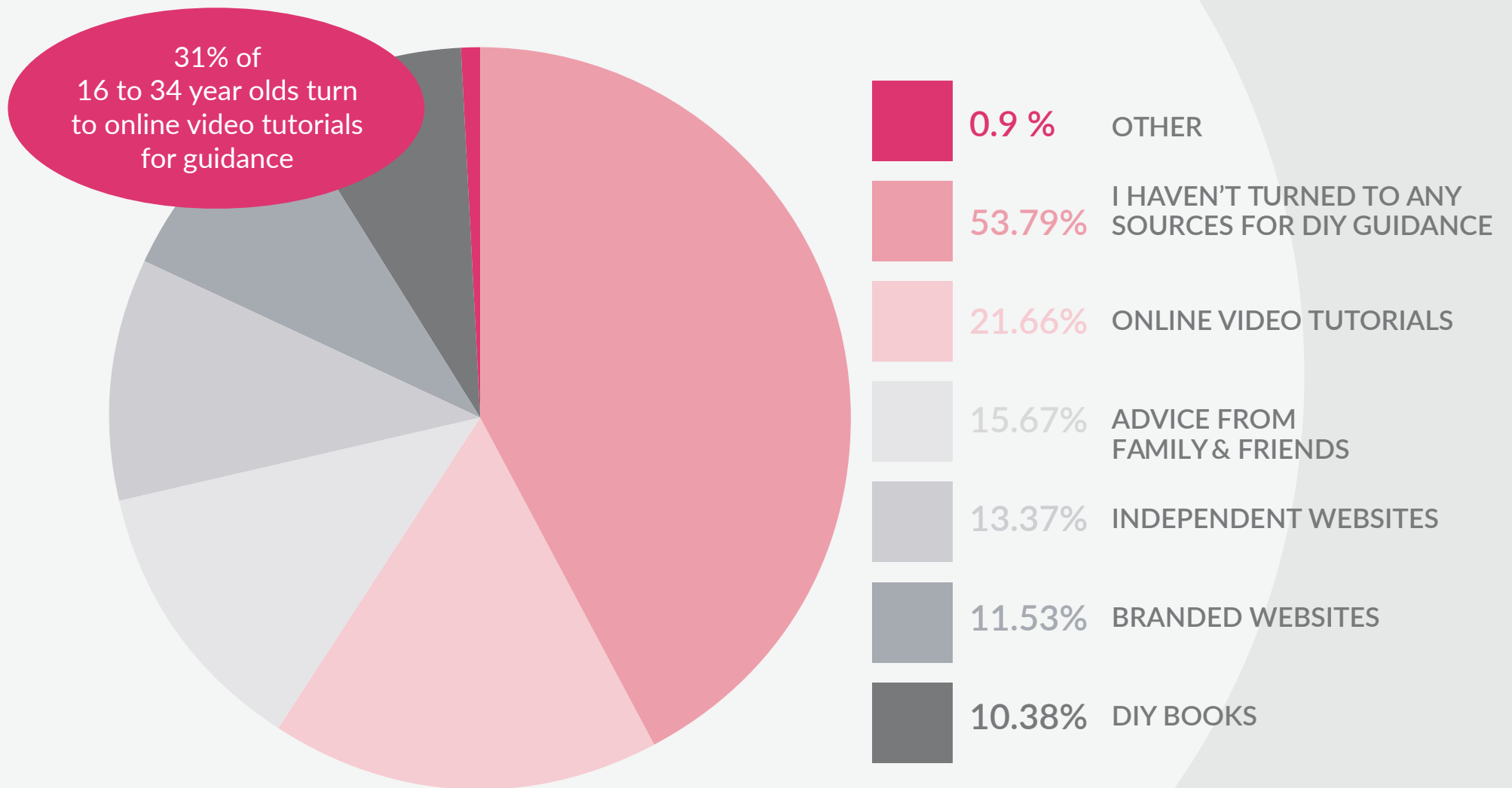
Get it right, and TikTok could be monumental in driving brand awareness and reach.

Take a look at how a brand hashtag challenge for eCommerce brand Zalora generated almost 100K video views, 1.1K user-generated videos and 19.75% brand takeover CTR.

## How has DIY in Lockdown affected the population?



## Where are Britons turning to for DIY advice in lockdown





## Why you need to be investing in social listening

The past three months have seen brands scrambling to figure out what to say amidst the uncertainty of the Covid-19 crisis. It's highlighted that brands are so focused on what they are saying, that actually listening might be a secondary thought.

Social listening is a perfect way of gauging a situation, allowing you to actively search around specific keywords or phrases to dig deep into people's perceptions. Businesses are able to tap into conversations happening on social media, in forums and on websites (e.g. news/forums), to gain a comprehensive snapshot of the conversations taking place.

There are four main ways in which social listening can support brands:

- **Brand health** - Analysing perceptions and sentiment around the brand, service and products allow businesses to make informed strategic decisions. Understanding key issues can inform anything from the type of messaging that is required in comms through to what should drive new product development. The opportunity lies both in informing strategy but also in reviewing the impact and reception of outward comms to see just what impact this has had.
- **Market Analysis** - Analysing the wider industry allows brands to contextualise how they fit in. A review of conversation volume is a good indication of share-of-voice while deeper dives into topics and mentions of competitors reveals the interest and motivations of consumers.
- **Insight development** - With a hunch in mind, social listening gives researchers and strategists the opportunity to get an instant answer about its validity. Social listening is an opportunity to find evidence and test concepts to ensure strategic development is on the right path.
- **Audience profiling** - There are a number of ways to get to know your audience better, whether that is getting demographic and interest data about people actively talking about your brand, analysing the interests and conversations your social followers are having away from your channels or segmenting audiences by the conversations they are having.

## ② Helping homeowners adapt their home for a COVID future



With **53% of people** identifying issues in the home that they've never noticed before, there is lots of intention to invest in the home going forward. Checktrade, the online trade directory, found that homeowners and renters could be **looking to spend an average of £1,179** once restrictions are lifted.

The crisis and ensuing lockdown in effect, pressed the reset button when it came to how people view their homes, changing from an escape from outside pressures to a multi-dimensional site required to accommodate work, schooling, relaxation, exercise and leisure on top of eating and sleeping.

While this has been a rapid and somewhat jarring process, the changes have seen people re-evaluate what their home means to them and the role that it plays, making changes that better reflect this changing landscape.

**39% of all respondents** (increasing to 49% of Londoners) have been directly prompted to do some DIY as a result of the lockdown.

Being 'locked in' has put a greater focus on the specific roles of individual rooms within the home and the benefits that they bring us. With a chance that a second wave of infection could arrive as lockdown eases, the public is conscious that their home needs to be suitable for whatever situation they find themselves in next.

## The death of open plan living (at least for now)

The biggest casualty has been the immediate challenges presented by open-plan living. It's estimated that **63%** of homes built since 2003 have an open-plan living room/dining spaces.

Now, with nowhere to go to seek solitude, many families are regretting this choice. Architects and design professionals are offering tips to combat this lack of 'zoning', with the moving of furniture to create spaces that allow for solitude.

## The search for sanctuary

When asked what aspects of the home made lockdown more bearable, respondents ranked reduction of stress and places to escape most highly.

Investing in improving the bedrooms comes top of the list with 43% of respondents choosing to spruce up this personal space during lockdown. Living rooms (34%) and bathrooms (26%) were also makeover hotspots.

Removing clutter and keeping some level of order has been vitally important for many Britons, with 34% needing homes to be organised & tidy to cope with lockdown.



## Creativity in the kitchen

Plenty of time on our hands and an appetite to create good food has seen the kitchen become especially important. We found that **29%** of respondents doing DIY chose to make changes to the kitchen, potentially motivated by a renewed interest in cooking.

The role of kitchens is moving away from simply representing a burden of cooking but instead it is moving further towards a place of escape and shared enjoyment with family, as well as a work from home location. It's likely this view will be maintained with 89% of respondents to the survey vowing to continue cooking more beyond lockdown.

## Working from home

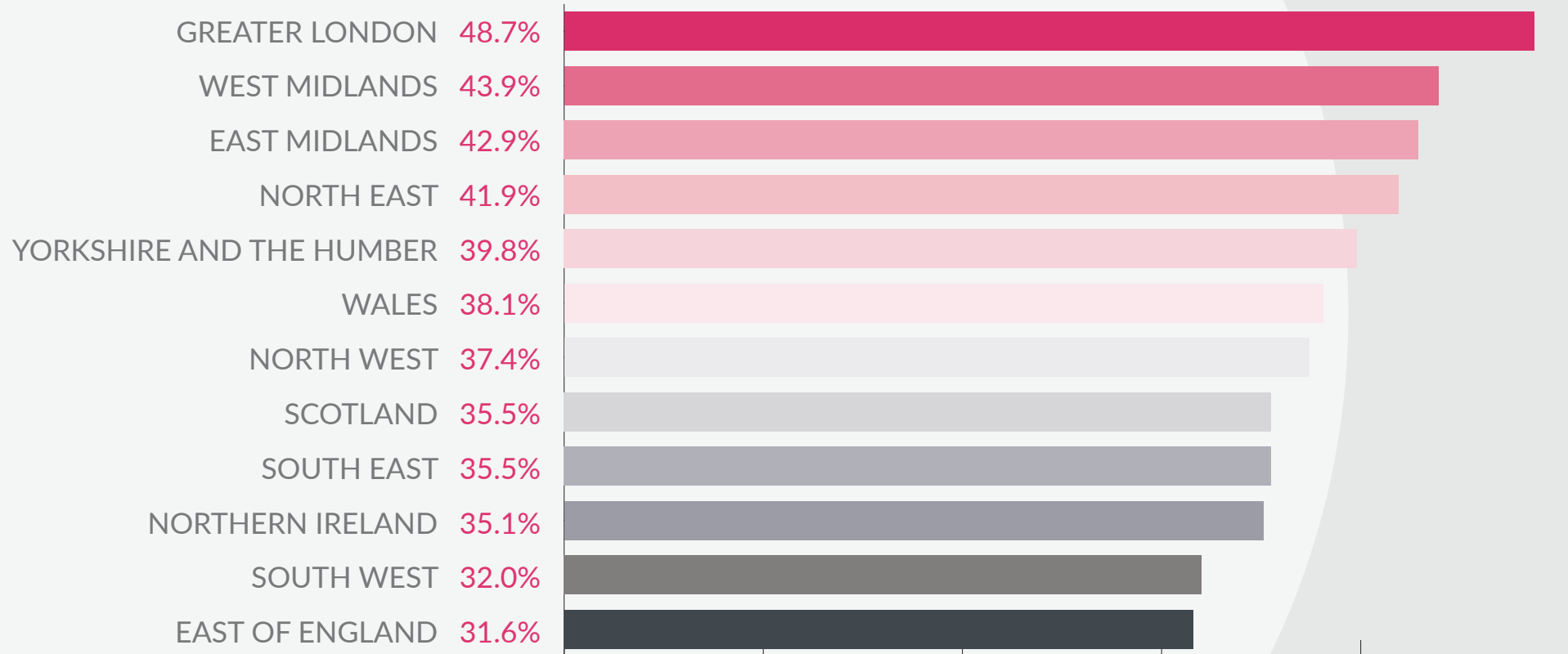
One in five people in our survey stated that they were able to work from home through the crisis.

This enormous shift towards remote working has fast tracked forced adaptation of new technology and working practices ensuring staff and processes are in place to deliver at the same level as they were before.

Now we know we can do it, businesses are unlikely to ever return to the way things were and will instead strike a balance between working from home and on-site working. Suggesting that going forward, creating a space for a practical home office, away from the hustle and bustle of the main house, will become a home essential.



# Has lockdown prompted you to make changes in your home interior?





# Opportunities



- Future proofing - with restrictions lifting, homeowners have a desire to future proof their homes - brands can respond with useful information that appeals to their practical need for making the most of every space. This ranges from demonstrating how to create spa-like bathrooms to hotel standard bedrooms alongside more practical measures like reducing sound in the home and creating different zones in our living spaces.
- Fresh start - for some homeowners, lockdown will have forced them to consider if it is time to put their house on the market. For this audience, brands have an opportunity to connect with data and insight about how to maximise the sale value and appeal to target buyers.
- Escape to the country - city dwellers who can't get to work and are living in shoebox flats are rightly questioning whether they need to be in the concrete jungles of skyscraper cities anymore. With the expected continuation of flexible working - work from anywhere rather than work from home - could be the 'new normal' so searching out living space by commute is no longer an issue. Property businesses can leverage this by highlighting rural locations where business can be done, in a beautiful location, without a tiresome commute.
- Be the expert - identify in-house experts in your organisation (or partner with an interior designer who can talk on your behalf) and reach out to broadcast media, podcasts and homes and interiors media with a raft of insights, from zoning rooms, to the right colour to aid concentration in a home office.



### 3 Winning rewards with the risk averse

Although many people are beginning to take a more pragmatic view to how they'll cope with the new normal, there are still plenty of people worried about lockdown coming to an end.

Brands can win by taking a consistent and considered approach to comms to those who fear the dangers of entering the instore environment, of parting with their cash ahead of a forecasted recession and of services that require a professional to enter their home.

#### Safety first

Much of this caution is driven by a nervousness towards a lack of social distancing, especially round getting to and from places.

This is especially reflected by the attitudes of our respondents, of which **66% stated they'd be worried about tube travel while 58% said the same for trains.**

Retailers that are keen to welcome shoppers back into their stores need to prioritise the most nervous shoppers. From parking rules to managing how people navigate their sites, businesses need to communicate how they are embracing precautions that keep everyone safe.

IKEA's reopening of 19 stores on June 1 showed that where there was an environment that lent itself to managing visitors and clear precautions were put in place, consumers were keen to invest time and money. In fact, this inclination was so pronounced that eager shoppers were queuing up as early as 5.30am at some stores.

#### Money matters

A combination of financial uncertainty has meant those who have managed to get through coronavirus with their salaries intact are saving more than ever before.

Just under two thirds of Brits have been spending less as a result of the outbreak with 60% of people managing to save money during lockdown (either by changing their lifestyle habits or recouping the costs of a planned holiday). Citimark, a financial advice firm, have estimated that the **average UK household could have saved almost £900 by now.**

Yet the forecasted recession and future employment risks mean that 39% of cautious homeowners are choosing to put the money aside to save it, a fifth were looking to spend the money straight away on improvements to their garden while 16% were choosing to do the same for the interior of their home.

Once job security has been ascertained, homeowners will be keen to make cash investments pay dividends in the long term and making solid investments in improving kitchens, bathrooms, outdoor space and extensions will add long term value to their home.

Interior brands are beginning to stimulate the market by offering consumer discounts for orders delivered. While this has the benefit of clearing warehouses of stock, these brands have seen an influx of enquiries which have been motivated to act quickly to take advantage of the offer.



## Delivering professional services in the home

From kitchen fitters to engineers, British trades professionals have been some of the hardest hit by Covid, as we come out of lockdown, we wanted to get a good idea about how homeowners would feel about a tradesman in their home.

In good news, almost half of the British public (48%) were not concerned about the idea of letting professionals into their home to undertake work.

Another 34% identified themselves as being 'somewhat concerned', an indication that where businesses are able to highlight and address concerns, there is a possibility of changing their minds.

While the market is struggling in the short term, it's clear that if the trade can reassure the homeowner that they can act safely, customers will start to welcome them back.



Opportunities



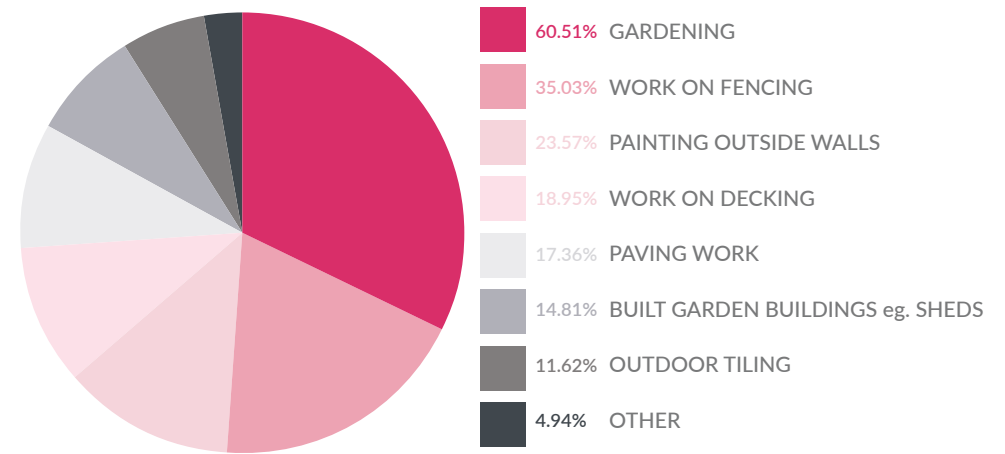
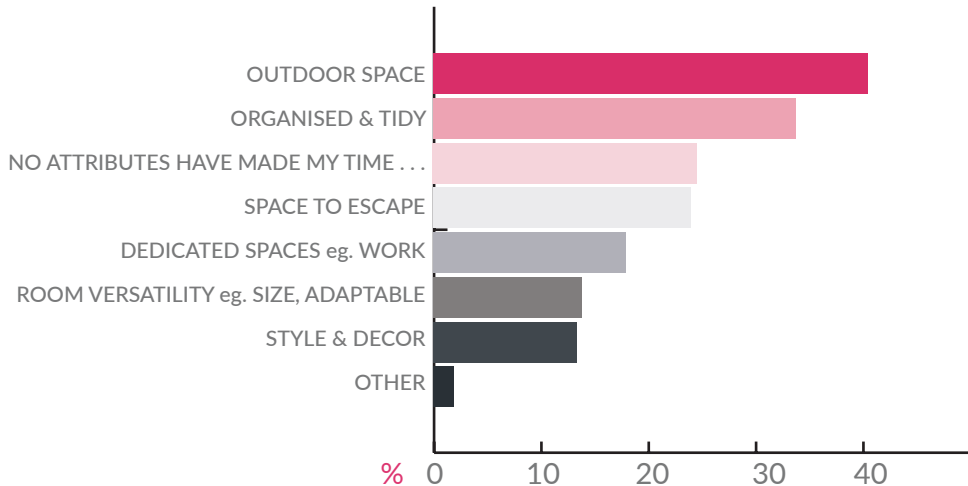


- Experts over influencers - risk averse groups need to know they're hearing from those with the most knowledge to buy into brand messaging.
- Reassurance at every level - having a multichannel route to market is essential to win big with risk averse shoppers. Some shoppers will not return to instore shopping for a long time, but for the middle group of people, they need a consistent comms plan shared across all channels that shows how you are doing business.
- Think long term - for cash conscious customers, short term deals may drive them to start spending again, but retailers should focus on the long term message on making sensible investments for the future value of your home.
- Best practice - brands have a job to do to highlight best practises not only to consumers but to tradesmen, offering guides and resources that allow them to inspire confidence on behalf of the business. Throughout the uncertainty of the crisis, stakeholder comms has been crucial and all businesses should continue to talk to their major stakeholders as we emerge through this crisis.
- Set up virtual showrooms / consultation opportunities for those who are nervous of entering the 'new normal' in a similar way to Dunelm. This way, new customers can be attracted to the business in a way that feels more personalised and comfortable without ever having to leave the home.

30% of 16-24 yr olds chose having 'dedicated spaces' as important to have in the home during lockdown

## Other findings

### What home attributes made lockdown bearable?

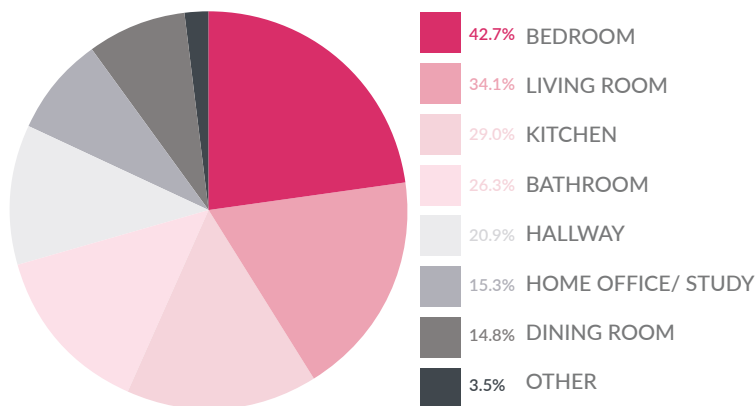


77% of over-45s have taken to gardening as a diversionary pastime

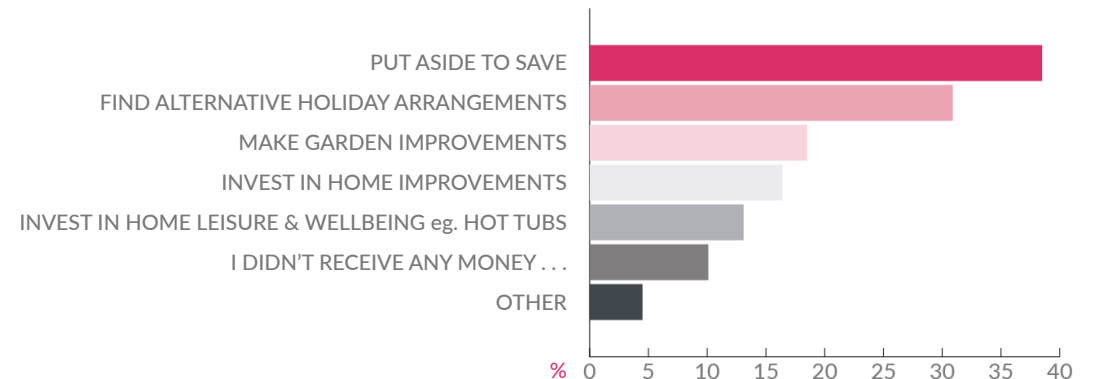
Rightmove searches for homes with gardens were up 42% in May

51% of over 55s chose 'outdoor space' as the most important attribute of their home during lockdown

### Where in the home did you work during lockdown?



### How do you plan to spend money that was meant for a summer holiday?



## Conclusion

Navigating a public health and economic crisis doesn't come with a guidebook for success. The successes we've seen to date have been down to the emotional intelligence of each brand's decision making and their agility as a communications team to react quickly.

The origins of the word for crisis contains elements of the word 'danger' but also the word 'opportunity' - and in this current global crisis, those two options are what brands have before them.

Yes things have changed but new opportunities have presented themselves as a result.

The brands that seize these new opportunities will be those who will safeguard their future in a post-Covid world. Those who recognise that times have changed permanently and pivot their communications approach quickly will be those who gain cut through with new audiences in the search of homes and interiors content that supports their new ways of living.

There are a raft of new opportunities for brands who recognise them and can engage with new customers in the right way, in the right place and at the right time. It has never been more important to get your communications strategy right. Are you ready?



## About Democracy

“

Democracy is a different breed of marketing agency - integrated, emotionally intelligent, data-driven and brave. We get people talking and change what people think, what they feel and what they do.

”

Our world class creative approach to storytelling centers on our belief that it is people, and not channels, that have the power to impact on the success of a brand.

The brands we partner with trust us to tell the stories that matter in a way that delivers a measurable return.

## What our clients say about us

“

The team at Democracy have always worked with us as an extension of our team, something which has been vital during the Covid-19 outbreak. They have provided valuable insight to our ongoing communications, working with us to devise PR and social media strategies to keep our staff and the wider industry informed and supported throughout this crisis

”

NUNO PENA, MARKETING DIRECTOR FOR AKZONOBEL

“

The Democracy team has been our eyes and ears in the market, keeping us in the loop with industry and competitors, going above and beyond to turn messaging/ideas around overnight, being available out of hours to support, flagging concerns and coming to the table ahead of the curve with ideas of how we can weather the storm. Each and every member of the Democracy team has been on point, every time.

”

JAMES HEESE, MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR TILE GIANT

“

Democracy has been an important partner to ATAG as the Covid-19 crisis has unfolded. Working to keep us informed and providing strategic counsel on how we can best support our people and community. Ensuring we deliver key messages to our customers via press and social media and proposing tactical content to support installers' businesses now and in the future.

”

SIMON PARKINSON, HEAD OF MARKETING FOR ATAG

“

What I love about Democracy is that you are never a B, C or D client. You're always an A. They are reliable, conscientious and diligent. Their strategic team really understands the world of the tradespeople. Their media and digital team bring the creative to life in engaging and thought provoking ways.

”

EMMA CHURCHILL, SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER  
FOR DULUX TRADE COMMUNICATIONS

## How to contact us

Whether the Coronavirus has created new business opportunities, or presented a real challenge to how you do business, paying attention to your communications right now will shape your future success.

Our team of senior strategists are available by videolink to talk through your situation, to offer insight and guidance, and to sense check your current communications plan.

To arrange a **FREE** hour long consultation call, please contact either Jennifer O'Grady or Caroline Aspinall.

Jen on 0161 881 5941 / 07515810451 or email [jennifer@democracypr.com](mailto:jennifer@democracypr.com)

Caroline on 0161 881 5941 / 07951763757 or email [caroline@democracypr.com](mailto:caroline@democracypr.com)